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ABSTRACT

Oral interpretation facilitates the learning processes of adolescents by making the presentation of subject matter more interesting and meaningful to them, helping them feel involved, and providing them with an opportunity to perceive literature in action. Narrative literature is a good place to begin oral interpretation activities, since storytelling increases students' speaking ability and helps them develop techniques to hold audience attention. Presenting prose, poetry, and drama in a storytelling, choral reading, or readers theatre format can also be an exciting way to explore literature. Choral reading helps illustrate comparison and contrast, rhyming patterns, alliteration, and imagery. Reading poetry aloud helps improve students' attitudes toward poetry. For example, a class activity in which each student contributes a line to create a poem is easy, fun, and productive. Music, another source of inspiration to writing and reading poetry, can help make a students' presentation interesting. In addition to classroom assignments, performance activities can stimulate productive student endeavors. For example, presenting Stephen Crane's "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" in a readers theatre format can help this story come alive for students. (This story, arranged by Billy Watson, is appended, as is an exercise for writing a poem.) (JD)

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ORAL INTERPRETATION: AN APPROACH TO TEACHING SECONDARY ENGLISH

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ORAL INTERPRETATION: AN APPROACH TO TEACHING SECONDARY ENGLISH

The uniqueness of early adolescence in regard to growth and development requires learning experiences consistent with the student's abilities. The junior high or middle school years seem to be an educational period of disquieting discontinuity. This perspective suggests that if students are to survive this critical period, the demands made by the school must be compatible with their intellectual and nonintellectual capacities (Finger and Silverman, 1969, p. 219). To facilitate the learning process, the student needs to feel involved: therefore, as many techniques as possible should be used to present subject matter in interesting and meaningful ways.

Oral interpretation lends itself to both educational purposes and entertainment. It is a good way to bring forth the creativity that lurks in every student and provide an atmosphere that will change the student's attitude toward learning.

Oral interpretation is in the unique position to provide training for the reader to perceive literature in action. Most students study about literature rather than being directly aware of it. Reading aloud requires them to become more involved in the material being presented.

Narrative literature is a good place for the middle or junior high student to begin. Nearly everyone loves a good story, and even if the middle school student thinks he is "too old for stories," he will usually listen intently to something like Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" or fables and myths.

Perhaps the role of storyteller as a member of a group will launch a student into attempting a solo performance later. Storytelling also increases speaking ability, helps develop techniques to hold an audience, and improves listening skills.

Presenting prose, poetry, and drama in a storytelling, choral-reading, or readers theatre format can be an exciting way to explore literature. These approaches are important educational tools in that they stimulate interest in literature, improve diction, and help students overcome stagefright. A group performance can produce more effective results because of the combined efforts (Washington, 1983, p. 118). The members of the group become a "collective storyteller," inviting the audience to explore with them (Thompson and Fredricks, 1969, p. 80).

Choral reading is a good method for illustrating comparison and contrast, rhyming patterns, alliteration, and imagery (Bammon, 1964, p. 54). Students enjoy doing poetry in this manner because it goes fast and doesn't become boring. Different classes will respond to various arrangements of literature. It is always interesting to let students choose and demonstrate an interpretation of their own.

Poetry is often a challenge to the English teacher. Essentially an oral form of communication, it is often taught by written analyses and/or class discussion approach. Students are usually required to memorize a certain number of lines to be presented orally sometime during the unit. This often results in students expressing dislike for poetry.

There is so much more to be gained from reading aloud or listening to another than reading silently from the page. If students understand something about the background of the author and the material, they can often equate it in some way with their favorite rock music or folk singer. Whether reading orally or listening, it is amazing how their attitudes toward poetry can change if they feel involved (Lambert, 1972, p. 678).

In his book Wishes, Lies, and Dreams, Kenneth Koch (1971) suggests that a class begin by writing a poem together with each student contributing one line. This method is easy, has rules like a game, and it is fun without the anxieties of competitiveness. Students tend to listen carefully because they are contributing to a group project. Collecting the lines and shuffling them, a complete poem emerges from their efforts. Students can see the importance of rhythm, language, and different poetic devices in their creations.

Music is another source of inspiration to poetry writing and reading. Listening to records or tapes, then making associations with sound, colors, places, and feelings can produce creative poetry. Students can read their own creations or exchange with and interpret other students' work. The same music can accompany the reader. This can produce an interesting presentation, and one that the students enjoy as performers and listeners.

In addition to classroom assignments, performance activities can stimulate productive endeavors on the part of the student. Literature can come alive through creative presentation. Oral interpretation offers the middle school English teacher the

opportunity to open new avenues for making class work more interesting and exciting. Presenting "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" in a readers theatre format, a Greek myth in a "collective storyteller" format, and poetry in a choral reading format can provide creative and memorable experiences for students. Oral interpretation extends the range of the speaking--listening experience to include all kinds of literature, and the approaches to presenting it are limited only by the teachers' and students' imagination.

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FLOWER POEM

DIRECTIONS: Compose your own poem about a flower by following the directions given below.

1. Write the name of a flower.
2. Write a descriptive line.
3. Write a prepositional phrase.
4. Write another prepositional phrase.
5. Write a free association line.
6. Write the name of a color.
7. Write the name of a color.
8. Write the name of a color.
9. Write the name of a color.
10. Write the name of your flower.
11. Write the first syllable of your flower's name.
12. Write a word related to 11.
13. Write the rest of the word in 11.
14. Write a word related to 13.
15. Combine 12 and 14 into one word.
16. Write the name of your flower.

"The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky"

by Stephen Crane

Arranged for readers theatre by Billy Watson

I.

1 The great pullman was whirling onward with such dignity of motion that a glance from the window seemed simply to prove that the plains of Texas were pouring eastward.

The groom's face was reddened from many days in the wind and sun, and a direct result of his new black clothes was that his brick-colored hands were constantly performing in a most conscious fashion.

2 The bride was not pretty, nor was she very young. She continually twisted her head to regard her puff sleeves, very stiff, straight and high. They embarrassed her.

1 Jack Potter, the town marshall of Yellow Sky, was a man known, liked, and feared in his corner. He had gone to San Antonio to meet the girl he believed he loved. He induced her to marry him, and now he was bringing her home to an innocent and unsuspecting community.

3 "Ever been in a parlor car before?"

4 "No, I never was. It's fine, ain't it?"

3 "Great. After a while we'll go to the diner and pay a dollar for the finest meal in the world."

4 "Why that's too much for us, ain't it, Jack?"

3 "Not this trip. We're going to go the whole thing."

1 He knew full well his marriage was an important thing to his town. His friends could not forgive him. Frequently he had reflected on the advisability of telling them by telegraph, but a new cowardice had been upon him. And now the train was hurrying him toward a scene of amazement, glee and reproach.

4 "What's worrying you, Jack?"

3 "I'm not worrying, girl. I'm only thinking of Yellow Sky. We're almost there."

II.

2 The California Express was due at Yellow Sky in twenty-one minutes. There were six men at the bar of the Weary Gentleman saloon. One was a newcomer, a traveling salesman who talked a great deal; three were Texans who didn't care to talk at this time; and two were Mexican sheepherders, who didn't talk as a general practice in the Weary Gentleman saloon.

The salesman's tale was interrupted by a young man who suddenly appeared in the open door.

"Scratchy Wilson's drunk and he's turned loose with both hands."

"Say, what is this?"

"It means for the next two hours this town won't be a health resort."

"You don't mean there's going to be a gunfight?"

"He's out to shoot and he's out for trouble. Why, he and Jack Potter..."

"Jack Potter's in San Anton."

"Who's he?"

"Town Marshall. He shot Wilson up once in the leg. I wish he was back from San Anton. He'd sail in and pull the kinks outa this thing."

They heard from a distance the sound of a shot, followed by three wild yowls.

"Here he comes."

III.

A man in a maroon-colored flannel shirt, rounded a corner and walked into the middle of Main Street. In

either hand he held a long, heavy, blue-black revolver. Often he yelled. These cries of ferocious challenge rang against walls of silence.

1 The man's face flamed in a rage begot of whiskey. His rolling eyes hunted the still doorways and windows. He walked with the creeping movement of the midnight cat. As it occurred to him, he roared menacing information. The long revolvers in his hands were as easy as straws; they were moved with an electric swiftness.

2 The man called to the sky his terrible invitations. The calm adobes preserved their demeanor. He bellowed and fumed and swayed his revolvers here and everywhere. Hammering with a revolver on the closed door of the Weary Gentlemen saloon, he demanded a drink. The door remained inperturbable. He moved in the direction of Jack Potter's house, chanting Apache scalp-music.

1 Taking up a strategic position, he howled a challenge, but the house regarded him as might a great stone god. He fumed at the house as the winter wind attacks a prairie cabin in the North. But the house gave no reply.

IV.

"Next corner, dear."

As Potter and his wife sheepishly turned the corner and he was about to raise a finger to point the first appearance of their new home, they came face to face with a man in a maroon-colored shirt, who was feverishly pushing cartridges into a large revolver. Dropping that revolver to the ground like lightning, he whipped another from his holster, and aimed it at the bridegroom's chest.

The two men faced each other at a distance of three paces. Potter's mouth seemed to be merely a grave for his tongue. The bride's face had gone as yellow as old cloth. He of the revolver smiled with a new and quiet ferocity.

"Tried to sneak up on me! No, don't you move a finger toward your gun, Jack Potter. Don't you move an eyelash. I'm going to settle with you--my way!"

"I ain't got a gun on me, Scratchy Wilson. You know I fight when it comes to fighting. But you'll have to do all the shooting yourself."

"Don't tell me you ain't got no gun on you. Don't tell me no lie like that. There ain't a man in Texas ever seen

you without no gun. Don't take me for no kid."

2 His face was livid. His eyes blazed, and his throat worked like a pump.

3 "I ain't takin' you for no kid. I'm takin' you for a damn fool. I tell you I ain't got a gun, and I ain't. If you're goin' to shoot me you better begin now; you'll never get a chance like this again."

1 Potter's heels had not moved an inch backward.

6 "If you ain't got a gun, why ain't you got a gun? Been to Sunday school?"

3 "I ain't got a gun because I've just come from San Anton--with my wife. I'm married! And if I'd thought there was going to be any galoots like you prowling around when I brought my wife home, I'd had a gun, and don't you forget it!"

6 "Married?"

3 "Yes, married!"

2 Scratchy Wilson was like a creature allowed a glimpse of another world. He moved a pace backward, and his arm, with the revolver, dropped to his side.

6 "Is this the lady?"

He was not a student of chivalry; it was merely that in the presence of this foreign condition he was a simple child of the earlier plains.

"Yes, this is the lady!"

There was another period of silence.

"Well, I s'pose it's all off now."

"It's all off if you say so, Scratchy. You know I didn't make the trouble."

"Married."

He looked at the ground, picked up his starboard revolver, and placing both weapons in their holsters, he walked away. His feet made funnel-shaped tracks in the heavy sand.